

## Processing wild game while giving back to local veterans

### AT A GLANCE

Idaho hunters learn to process and preserve wild game while feeding local food insecure veterans and their families.

### The Situation

Last year, nearly 4,000 big game animals were harvested from Idaho Fish and Game units five and six which cover Benewah County. For those nearly 4,000 successful hunters, there are only a handful of butchers left in the area that will process game animals. The number of hunters in the county is growing, up by 15% from 2022-2023. Many hunters want to process their harvests themselves but have never been taught how. With the number of hunters increasing in the region annually, there are more and more hunters who did not grow up harvesting their own food and the knowledge of processing is being lost with the new generation of hunters. Knowing the ins and outs of processing game is helpful to successfully feeding your family.

Benewah county has a food insecurity rate of 12.4% which is higher than the state average. In addition, Benewah County has a very high population of local veterans, and the Veterans Outreach Center provides food to 26 veteran families monthly and feeds 60 veterans hot meals weekly. They rely on donations by the local community to help feed these veterans and their families. Idaho Fish and Game will donate carcasses, but



Class participants getting hands on experience breaking down a white-tailed deer. Photo by Lauren King.

they still need to have the animal processed to distribute to the community which can be costly.

### Our Response

The University of Idaho Extension office in Benewah County partnered with Idaho Fish and Game Panhandle Regional Office, the local Veterans Outreach Center, and a local butcher to put on a Wild Game Processing class to help educate the public on wild game processing. The class included how to break down a wild game carcass, proper carcass care, what the different cuts of meat are, and the differences between home processing and taking it to a butcher.

The class was a hands-on experience where all participants got to get their hands on the carcass and practice

their knife skills. One of our local Master Food Safety advisors was on hand to help answer questions about preservation methods of wild game and the local conservation officer was there to talk about harvesting from an Idaho Fish and Game standpoint and what they expect from hunters. Idaho Fish and Game brought in confiscated carcasses to be processed and then all the processed meat was donated back to the local Veterans Outreach Center and will be distributed to local veteran families in need.

After all the meat was cut and wrapped, the local conservation officer, Mark Maret, showed participants how to sample lymph nodes for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), which is a deadly, neurological disease that has recently been found in Idaho wildlife. Optional testing is available to any hunters in the region who wish to help monitor the local wildlife populations.

## Program Outcomes

During the class, participants were able to fully break down and cut and wrap two adult deer. This yielded venison over 100 meals that can be distributed to local veterans and their families.

We had a wide range of participants in this new University of Idaho Extension program, ranging from youth, seasoned adult hunters and future hunters. Their feedback showed their appreciation for the program and provided valuable skills for them to successfully process their own harvests in the future.

Some of the feedback we received included:

- “This was a great environment for learning! Loved it! Hands on knowledge, sharing from experts and others.”
- “As someone who processed my own game meat before this class, it was interesting to see how the

real butcher did it differently and any tips and tricks he and the other experts had.”

- “Excellent opportunity. Well-trained and knowledgeable instructors. Having the opportunity to cut and process an animal was very helpful.”

Beyond this feedback, the local newspaper did an article promoting the class and we were able to promote the new Veterans Outreach Center being built in St. Maries. The public got to have positive engagements with one of the local conservation officers and understand the importance of hunting lawfully and ethically. Developing this relationship will hopefully help aid in future positive conversations with Idaho Fish and Game and the public. Idaho Fish and Game was also able to educate on the importance of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) monitoring to help the local wildlife populations.

## The Future

Based on feedback from this program, we intend to do it again in the future. There have been requests made for more general home preservation classes as well as future processing classes.

Idaho Fish and Game and the Veterans Outreach Center were very supportive of the programming and wanted to see it continue in the future. We look forward to hosting this again and expanding it to include more steps in the preservation process to continue to educate the public on important skills for successful home preservation while feeding the local community.

## Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Thank you to Idaho Fish and Game Conservation Officer Mark Maret. Veterans Outreach Center Coordinator Hank Thornton. Wild Game Butcher Lonnie Phay.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Lauren King**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Benewah County • 208-885-8766 • [laurenking@uidaho.edu](mailto:laurenking@uidaho.edu)

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